

To: House Judiciary Committee

**From: Kristin Best, Program Manager, God's Love Family Transitional Center,
Helena, MT (406) 443-6007**

Date: February 7, 2007

RE: Support of HB 60, Civil Access to Justice Act

EXHIBIT

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2/7/07

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I support the passage of HB 60. As the program manager for transitional housing for families, part of my work entails assisting clients with connecting to the appropriate resources and services in the Helena community. At times, I have spoken with different attorneys and law firms about providing pro bono services to our clients, because Helena Legal Services is often so overwhelmed by the high demand of their services.

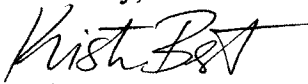
I estimate that about 50-75% of families enter our program with some sort of civil issue that needs legal attention. The primary legal issues that families need help with usually involve divorce (often due to domestic abuse) or child custody issues, including parenting plans. Due to lack of financial resources, private attorneys are not an option for our families, which leaves Helena Legal Services to coordinate and oversee the cases of all the low income families in this city.

Most concerning to me is the need for immediate legal attention when a single woman or mother with children needs to legally extricate herself and her children from an abuser. When this is not taken care of promptly, there is often further abuse that occurs and/or the mother has no legal grounds to keep her children from visiting or sharing custody with the father, even if he is a danger to the children or continues to be abusive and manipulative to the mother.

This bill would provide one more significant benefit to compromised families by improving upon and increasing much needed legal resources and providing faster resolution to very stressful social situations which often serve as barriers toward families trying to attain self sufficiency and improve their lives.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill. I encourage this committee to support the passage of House Bill 60.

Sincerely,



Kristin Best